# THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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## THE EVERLYS & ROMANCE

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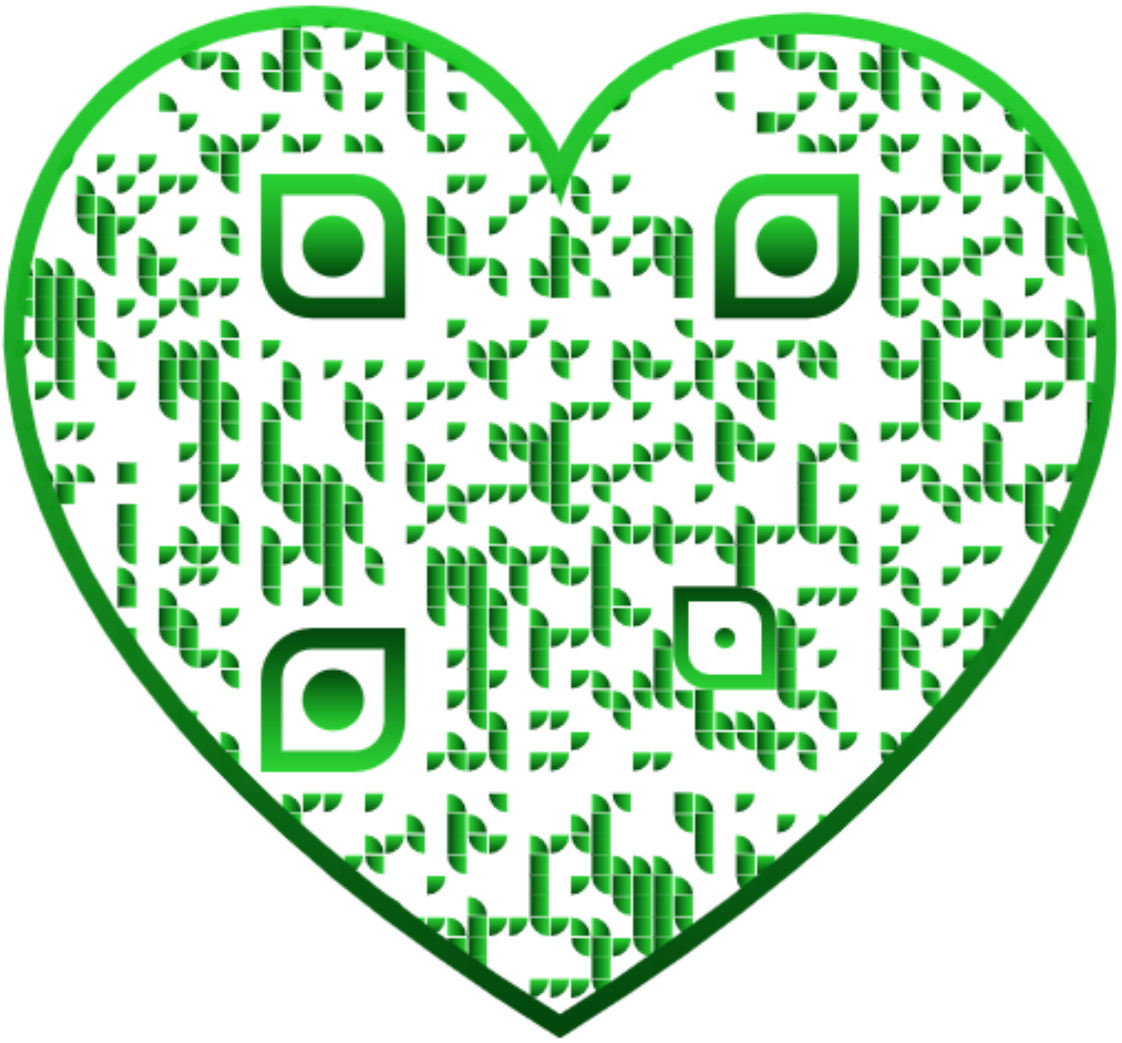

# THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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## Contents

**A Romance with Rock** 221
Did rock express anything more than raw sex and cheap sentimentality?
*Ashley Brown*

**Don and Phil** 224
The Everlys were the kings of high school rock
*Adam Komorowski*

**Country Tunesmiths** 230
Would the Everlys have tasted success without the songs of the Bryants?
*Clive Anderson*

**Nashville Cats** 232
The producers and musicians who made country music a multi-million-dollar industry
*Martin Hawkins*

**At The Hop** 235
White doo-wop: close harmonies and corny lyrics
*Bill Millar*

**Sweetheart Years** 238
The dilemmas of sex and romance in Fifties rock
*Cynthia Rose*

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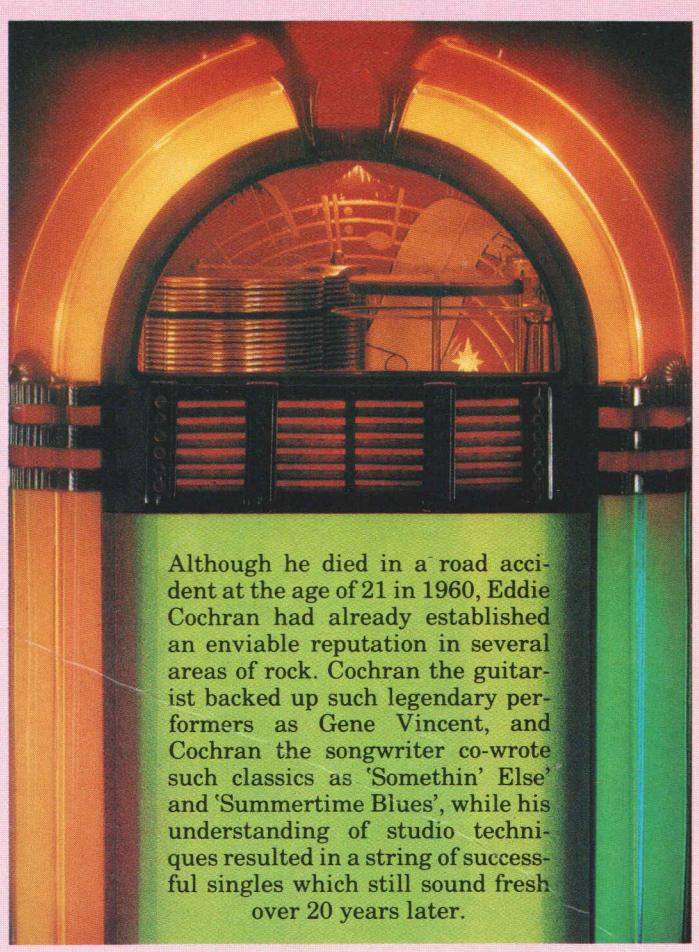

Although he died in a road accident at the age of 21 in 1960, Eddie Cochran had already established an enviable reputation in several areas of rock. Cochran the guitarist backed up such legendary performers as Gene Vincent, and Cochran the songwriter co-wrote such classics as 'Somethin' Else' and 'Summertime Blues', while his understanding of studio techniques resulted in a string of successful singles which still sound fresh over 20 years later.

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# A Romance with Rock

## Did rock express anything more than raw sex and cheap sentimentality?

BLUES AND COUNTRY, black and white; the combinations which had given birth to rock 'n'roll might be extended to include the poles of raw sex and cheap sentiment. But whereas the reaction of many observers was to lambast the music for its suggestive sexual content, the establishment encouraged the sentimental side of rock as being more akin to popular music. During the late Fifties, the earthier concerns of rock'n'roll hardly moved on at all, but the sentimental side did take on new aspects – often in the most banal and embarrassing ways, but sometimes (in the hands of the Everly Brothers, for example) in expressive, dynamic music which still seems romantic and attractive today.

The blues had developed as a song form expressing the feelings of an oppressed people. It dealt directly with everyday experiences – work, poverty and, of course, sexual relationships. This direct, unvarnished approach was taken over into the lyrics of rhythm and blues. In this aggressive, rhythmic music, sexual references were overt or only thinly disguised. Hank Ballard's series of 'Annie' records in the early Fifties, for example, enjoyed an enormous success among black audiences; the songs were open in their sexual language and described the consequences and problems of sexual relationships – from 'Work With Me Annie' to 'Annie Had A Baby'. Tunes such as these formed the rhythmic basis of rock and were borrowed wholesale by many white rock 'n'roll musicians; but the lyrics were often a problem. Bill Haley covered (and had great success with) blues-shouter Joe Turner's 'Shake, Rattle And Roll', but he had to tone down the very first line – from 'Get out of that bed and wash your face and hands', to 'Get into that kitchen and wash them pots and pans'.

Country music brought its own particular preoccupations to bear on rock'n'roll. Before the Forties, 'country' – like blues – had been a rural folk music which expressed common concerns and it provided the background for innumerable social occasions. But whereas typical blues lyrics were concerned with describing the very basic issues and choices in any situation, country often dealt with another aspect of human nature – the tendency towards maudlin reminiscence and sentimentality. In the commercial country music of the Forties and Fifties, this tendency produced tales of death and divorce, drinking and adultery that were some of the most lugubrious slop of which twentieth-century popular music has been guilty – and yet, despite this, country music also produced inspired songs that deeply affected millions of people.

Early rock'n'roll simplified the elements it borrowed from other styles; and just as the powerhouse rhythms of R&B could easily become a safe formula (as they did eventually in the hands of Bill Haley), so blues-based lyrics could lose any meaning, becoming mere repeated doggerel or unsubtle (and often uninteresting) recitals of sexual exploits. The same, of course, went for country lyrics; they could drift into a meaningless ambience of clichés which expressed nothing about real relationships.

*The Everly Brothers (Don right, Phil left) were the embodiment of teenage romance during the Fifties.*

It was not inevitable, however, that rock would stumble along these divergent and equally unreal paths. The music's capacity for simple, direct expression and for encapsulating the hopes of teenagers who were prey to contradictory emotions was carried on in the late Fifties by stars such as Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers. These white artists expressed the ambivalent feelings of teenagers caught between the demands of school, parents and their interest in the opposite sex.

The music of the Everlys succeeded in expressing these feelings precisely because their

*Above: Chet Atkins, one of the creators of the Nashville sound. Below: Two very different influences on rock personified by Jim Reeves (left) – cowboy clothes and country ballads – and Joe Turner – the drive and power of R&B.*

songs described the range of emotions from physical sexual desire to the obsessions of the teenage crush – all these were part of rock, part of the Everlys' musical inheritance. And, in being able to describe the two extremes, the Everlys could then take in large areas of the ground in between. Their soaring, optimistic harmonies were the perfect match for their subject-matter – the interests of small-town boys and girls with reputations to keep up and self-respect to nurture, but nonetheless fascinated by the game of love. Even tunes with ostensibly mournful subject-matter – 'Bye Bye Love', for example – became transformed into joyous hymns in praise of the romantic feelings themselves, irrespective of whether these were of unbridled joy or of utter despair.

That the Everlys were able to express these shades of romance, always bordering on the sentimental, was because of their background in the country tradition. They had grown up in the Midwest and Kentucky, singing country songs in their family's show, and when they struck out as a duo they put down strong musical roots in Tennessee. Nashville guitarist and producer Chet Atkins was an early guide, and their great early hits were written by the team of Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, who had moved to the city in the early Fifties and had written several country hits before the success of 'Bye Bye Love'.

Country songs were primarily narratives – they told a developing story – whereas rock 'n'roll had generally described a single set of feelings, with the lyrics of the different verses often interchangeable (as was the case in many of Little Richard's hits, for example). The introduction of this narrative element into mainstream rock by the Everlys was one of the main reasons why they were able to describe teenage feelings about sex and sentiment with more subtlety than had previously been possible.

In its turn, country music had been profoundly affected by the rock'n'roll revolution (to which, of course, it had made an enormous contribution). In the Fifties, the instrumentation of fiddles and banjos and the atmosphere of hoe-downs and rural life began to be overtaken by a new, sharper style, more urban,

more successful nationally, and centred in Nashville. Country and rock have always influenced each other, both musically and emotionally. The emergence of the 'Nashville Sound' during the late Fifties and the success of the Everlys were both early examples of this.

In moving on to become a nationally popular music, country did not totally lose its roots. Whatever the wilder excesses of some country artists, they still felt themselves part of a solid tradition, and this feeling of building on a solid foundation has sustained country music through many vicissitudes. The Bryants, for example, did not become Tin Pan Alley songwriters after their years of success composing for the Everlys; they continued in Nashville and, as if to demonstrate their continued identification with the community, a song of theirs ('Rocky Top') was adopted by the University of Tennessee football team, and was proposed as an official song for the state.

*Above and left: Success as country music composers brought its rewards for Felice and Boudleaux Bryant – here they are presented with a 'plaque of gratitude' from the University of Tennessee for their song 'Rocky Top'. Below left: Canadian doo-wop group the Crewcuts cashed in with covers of black R&B hits, using lush close harmonies.*

**High school romance**

If the continuing importance of country was one indication of rock's involvement with sentiment and romance, so too was the emergence of white singing groups (closely modelled on black originals) in the mid to late Fifties. Just as did the Everlys, these groups sang of the romantic aspirations of white high school adolescents – and, just as with country, often descended into schmaltz.

Whereas country had roots, however, the white doo-woppers did not. They were a hothouse growth killed off by the chill winds of the British invasion of the early Sixties. Yet at their best, these white doo-wop groups were working towards what the Everlys achieved: songs which dealt accurately and optimistically with sex, sentiment and love. Rock in the late Fifties could indeed express romance.

ASHLEY BROWN

# DON & PHIL

## The Everlys were the kings of high school rock

THE LATE FIFTIES and early Sixties saw the Everly Brothers establish a virtual stranglehold on the charts on both sides of the Atlantic with a seemingly unending string of hits. The Everlys' influence was far reaching; they were the great romantics of their age and laid the foundations for the sound of the beat groups of the Sixties in their vocal style and the backings they used.

Parents Ike and Margaret Everly gave their two sons a good grounding in the music business. Ike played guitar; a native of Central City, Kentucky, he quit the coalmines at the age of 25 and headed for the Midwest in pursuit of a musical career in the new medium of radio. He had reputedly acquired his guitar technique from the black Kentuckian, Arnold Schultz, who played a two-finger blues guitar style known colloquially (more in admiration than in derision) as 'nigger pickin''. Ike and his spouse played and sang on breakfast shows in Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana. In 1937 they were resident in Brownie, Kentucky, where, on 1 February of that year, their first son, Isaac Donald, was born. Their second son, Philip, was born on 19 January 1939 in Chicago.

*Don and Phil: twin guitars, shimmering vocal harmonies, good looks and plenty of brilliantine.*

The two boys were quickly incorporated into the family radio programme, the first song that Don ever learned being the Mills Brothers' 'Paper Doll'. The family kept on the move – after Chicago they lived in Iowa for a while, and then in Virginia. The boys' musical tuition remained in the capable hands of their father and, after an early skirmish with the violin, each chose the guitar as their instrument. Both were left-handed but played the guitar right-handed; it was the only way Ike was able to teach them.

**Million-dollar experience**

Don was first to make his radio debut, on Joe Parrish's local radio show in Shenandoah County, Virginia, impressing sufficiently to gain his own 'Little Donnie' show not long afterwards. By the time he was seven, Don and his five-year-old brother were appearing regularly on their parents' radio show. It was a typical family community-type radio show with all the members participating, both individually and as a group. They would sing and strum, playing both country and gospel songs like 'That Old Rugged Cross' and 'Don't Let Love Die'. 'It was a million dollars' worth of experience for the boys,' their mother would later recall.

When time eventually ran out for the Everlys' radio show in Knoxville in 1955, the two parents gave up full-time music, while the two boys decided to stay in Tennessee to finish their schooling and work on their act. Ike became a barber, and one of his regular customers was Boudleaux Bryant, a musician who had played with Hank Penny. Bryant was later to become a significant figure in the Everlys' story.

The two boys had meantime moved to Nashville in an effort to set up their career. It was tough going; the town was packed with young hopefuls hustling for a break. Don and Phil were encouraged through this trying period by Chet Atkins, whom the family knew from the early Fifties. It was he who arranged for Don's composition 'Thou Shalt Not Steal' to be placed with vocalist Kitty Wells; it brought in some very welcome income.

The brothers' aim was to get a recording contract; as Don admitted, 'We auditioned for everybody, we'd sing at the drop of a hat'. Columbia gave them their first chance, as Phil later explained, '... because the head of the Country department had a mistress that liked us. That's how I think it really happened: we sang for them in their suite one afternoon and she said, "ain't they cute", and we got on records. We'd have done anything for 60 dollars and that's what the session fee was.'

The Everlys signed a six-month contract with Columbia on 8 November 1955. On the following day Carl Smith's Tunesmiths, who had just driven several hundred miles in from a show, accompanied the two brothers at the Tulane Hotel in Nashville, a venue Columbia used for recording. The group were in no mood for a prolonged session and four numbers were cut in just 22 minutes. With Johnny Sibert on steel guitar, Sammy Pruett and Jimmy Smith on guitars, Junior Huskey on bass and Dale Potter on fiddle, the Everly Brothers recorded four of their own compositions. 'Keep A-Lovin' Me' backed with 'The Sun Keeps Shining' was released on 6 February 1956, but sank without trace. The other two tracks lay in the vaults until 1981, when all four titles appeared on a retrospective EP. The songs were unremarkable country waltzes, but provided a first demonstration of the two brothers' ability to harmonise.

After the six-month Columbia contract expired, auditions for Capitol and Cadence were unsuccessful and, with funds and spirits low, Don and Phil were on the point of rejoining their parents in Chicago when they auditioned for Wesley Rose, son of the founder of the famous Acuff-Rose publishing company. Rose was in the process of setting up a country and western division for Archie Bleyer's Cadence label which was, at the time, in need of a major act to rank alongside Andy Williams. Rose put forward the Everlys' name to the record company boss, but Bleyer, having already turned them down, was not enthusiastic. 'I told Wesley Rose I'd heard the tape and wasn't too impressed, and he said, "let me make up a tape and send it to you." He did, and I was impressed this time.'

With Wesley Rose as their manager the Everly Brothers signed to Cadence late in 1956. In the year which had passed since their Columbia session, the boys had been exposed to the assault of rock'n'roll as records by Little Richard, Bill Haley, Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry took the charts by storm. The Everlys needed the dash of black rhythm that rock'n'roll supplied to transform their sound into a highly individual and successful commodity.

**A winning combination**

Together with his wife Felice, Boudleaux Bryant had meanwhile signed to Acuff-Rose and the pair had notched up several hits as songwriters. In 1956 they wrote 'Bye Bye Love'. At first they were unable to place it and several artists turned it down. But when the Everlys signed to Cadence, manager Wesley Rose put it forward to them as a number worth considering. Don added an instrumental intro and the boys recorded the song on 3 January 1957 at RCA's Studio B in Nashville. The session was arranged by their old friend Chet Atkins, who also played guitar. Atkins had assembled some of the top freelance musicians in town: drummer Murray 'Buddy' Harman, Floyd 'Lightnin'' Chance on bass and guitarists Ray Edenton and James Cayton Day.

'Bye Bye Love' was released in March 1957, by which time the brothers had embarked on a three-week tour of Mississippi. In their absence the record took off, astonishingly quickly, and they returned from the tour to find it in the national charts. Reaching Number 2 in the Hot Hundred, 'Bye Bye Love' topped the country charts and even appeared at Number 5 in the R&B charts.

The Everlys were part of the well-established tradition of country acts which employed high-register harmonies as a feature of their music. Bill Monroe had been recording vocal harmony with a bluegrass backing, since 1936, while the Louvin Brothers had become influential with a similar style in the early Fifties. Both Monroe and the Louvins recorded albums of gospel material alongside their secular work, betraying the religious origins of their harmony arrangements.

While Wesley Rose had undoubtedly been attracted to the Everlys by their harmonies, the influence of rock'n'roll was also an important part of the brothers' recorded work. Don Everly's rhythm guitar work frequently reflected his love of the Bo Diddley style of chopped, syncopated chords, while the Everlys were later to cover Little Richard numbers without sounding out of their depth. With one playing a chord sequence down the neck and the other duplicating this on the higher frets, using a capo, the brothers created an unusual acoustic guitar sound that became an Everly trademark.

The songs, initially written by the Bryants, varied little from the narrow emotional themes of teen romance, as the titles themselves show. Even when the brothers graduated to writing all their own material at the turn of the decade, they saw no reason to stray from the world of school, girlfriends and parents which had yielded them so many hits.

Each song was arranged in detail, both vocally and instrumentally, before recording, to give the Everlys a 'produced' sound, which nevertheless tended towards understatement. The vocals rode on a backing of two acoustic guitars, with bass, drums, and piano (the latter often played by Floyd Cramer) anchoring the sound unobtrusively. An electric lead solo added the final touch.

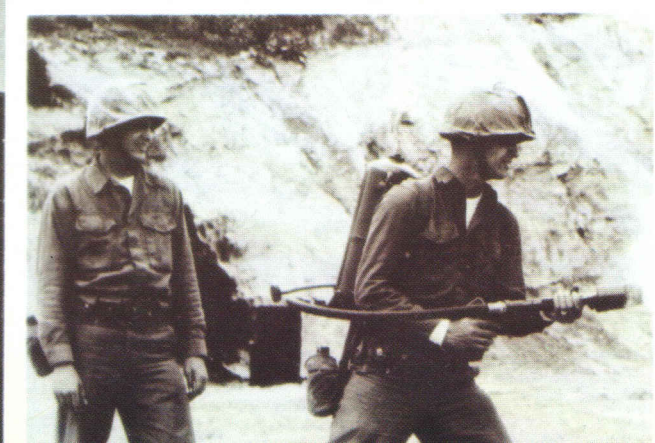
**Debut at the Opry**

On 11 May 1957 Don and Phil made their debut on the 'Grand Ole Opry' and were soon to be seen on such top TV shows as those of Ed Sullivan, Perry Como, Arthur Murray, Patti Page and Bob Crosby.

The second single, 'Wake Up Little Susie', was specifically written by the Bryants for the brothers and they recorded the song at their second Cadence session. Company boss Archie Bleyer didn't like it, considering the lyrics too suggestive. An expurgated version was issued, but even this relatively harmless opus of staying out all night with a girlfriend gave offence in Boston, where it was banned. This didn't prevent it, however, from becoming a US Number 1.

The Everlys' sound was so distinctive that it was almost impossible to rush out quick cover versions. Attempts by British artists to copy Stateside hits – a practice which had had some success previously – failed lamentably in the case of the Everlys' records. 'Bye Bye Love' was covered by the Beverly Sisters, Rory Blackwell and the Blackjacks, Russ Conway and the Dene Boys, in all cases unsuccessfully in chart terms. 'Wake Up Little Susie', a UK Number 2 for the Everlys, was given a try by the King Brothers and Russ Conway. By the time the brothers' third single, 'This Little Girl of Mine' was released, not one single British act attempted to emulate them. It didn't take long for the lesson

HOLLYWOOD - HAWAIIAN HOTEL



to be learned; the Everlys were unique.

'This Little Girl of Mine', had only reached the US Number 28 position, but four consecutive double-sided hits continued the run of success during 1958-59; 'All I Have To Do Is Dream'/'Claudette' (Nos 1 and 30 in the US charts), 'Bird Dog'/'Devoted To You' (Nos 2 and 10), 'Problems'/'Love Of My Life' (Nos 2 and 40) and 'Poor Jenny'/'Take A Message To Mary' (Nos 22 and 16). With the recording in mid-1959 of 'Till I Kissed You'/'Oh What A Feeling' the Everlys added a new dimension to their repertoire as Don had written both numbers; previously the brothers had only written the occasional flipside. These two sides also reflected the friendships the two had developed within the music business; Jerry Allison and Sonny Curtis from the Crickets played on the session, for example.

**Back to the roots**

In the summer of 1958, Don and Phil recorded *Songs Our Daddy Taught Us*, an album that clearly demonstrated their roots. It was a bold move, for it comprised tracks some way removed from their hit material, with songs like 'Lightning Express', 'Barbara Allen' and 'Rovin' Gambler'. Nevertheless, the harmonies remained unmistakable.

The brothers were always willing to experiment: for the ninth release, 'Let It Be Me', they forsook Nashville for the first time, to record in New York with an orchestra containing eight violins and a cello. Written by Frenchman Gilbert Becaud, the song was another Top Ten hit in 1960. The same year saw the Everlys make their first concert tour of the UK backed by the three Crickets – Sonny Curtis, Jerry Allison and Joe B. Mauldin.

By December 1959, Don was married and a father, although such was the fans' attitude to married teenage idols that the fact was initially kept a closely-guarded secret. Things were not going too well at Cadence, however; Wesley Rose had a vested interest in using Acuff-Rose songs, while Bleyer wanted the freedom to choose the brothers' material as he wished. This conflict soured relations all round, even to the extent of communicating itself to the musicians at recording sessions. Rose started looking around for a new company. His choice finally rested with Warner Brothers, who granted the Everlys a then-unprecedented 10-year recording contract.

The Everlys signed to Warners in February 1960, having sold 15,000,000 records in the previous three years. The duo expressed the hope that this deal would give them greater freedom to experiment on albums, but their debut

*The Everlys' story: early days; young stars in Hollywood; with parents (centre); on stage and in the studio; and in the US Marines. This was the public image, but life wasn't always smiles under the surface for Don and Phil.*

single demonstrated that changes were already occurring. Released in 1960, 'Cathy's Clown' topped the charts on both sides of the Atlantic. Written by Don and Phil, it successfully combined that teenage angst, which the Bryants had so successfully incorporated in their compositions, with a more substantial backing.

Archie Bleyer then released some material he still had 'in the can'; 'When Will I Be Loved'/'Be-Bop-A-Lula' was issued in July 1960 and made the Top Ten in both the US and UK. Bleyer issued two more singles in the US: 'Like Strangers'/'Brand New Heartache' and 'Lightning Express'/'I'm Here To Get My Baby Out Of Jail' appeared in 1961 and 1962 respectively. Only the former was released in the UK, where it made Number 12.

**Two sides of a hit**

The Everlys' success continued unabated on Warner Brothers; five of their first six singles were double-sided hits, three of them hitting Number 1 in the UK. Their second single 'Lucille', the old Little Richard number, was given a powerhouse treatment by no less than six of Nashville's top guitarists, including Chet Atkins, Hank Garland, Ray Edenton and Sammy Pruett. Though time has treated it unkindly, 'Ebony Eyes' was perhaps the definitive death song of the era, and came complete with deadpan monologue. This maudlin account of an air disaster hit Number 8 in the US, while its slightly more cheerful B-side, 'Walk Right Back', achieved the Number 1 position in the UK. The latter was a Sonny Curtis composition, and probably ranks as one of the brothers' finest recordings.

The Everlys' first eponymous Warner Brothers album was a workmanlike effort produced by Don and Phil themselves, but the second, *A Date With The Everly Brothers*, was certainly one of the finest albums of the early Sixties. It contained three hits in 'Cathy's Clown', 'Stick With Me Baby' and 'Lucille', but almost any other track could also have been pulled off at the time as a hit single. In an era when albums were generally built around one or two hits and padded out with numerous 'fillers', this album was something of an innovation.

**The Everlys sing Crosby**

That the Everlys experimented continually is borne out by the number of alternate and frequently unissued versions of their tracks. One such was 'Temptation'; a 1934 song from the Bing Crosby film *Going Hollywood*, it was first recorded on 17 September 1960 at the same session as 'Walk Right Back'. Although Wesley Rose didn't like it, Don and Phil re-recorded the song on a weekend trip to Nashville on 1 November 1960. Coupled with 'Stick With Me Baby', it was issued in May 1961, the same month that the brothers cut a third version of the song. 'Temptation' proved to be the song that brought about the split between Rose and the Everlys, the disagreement once again revolving around the brothers' choice of material.

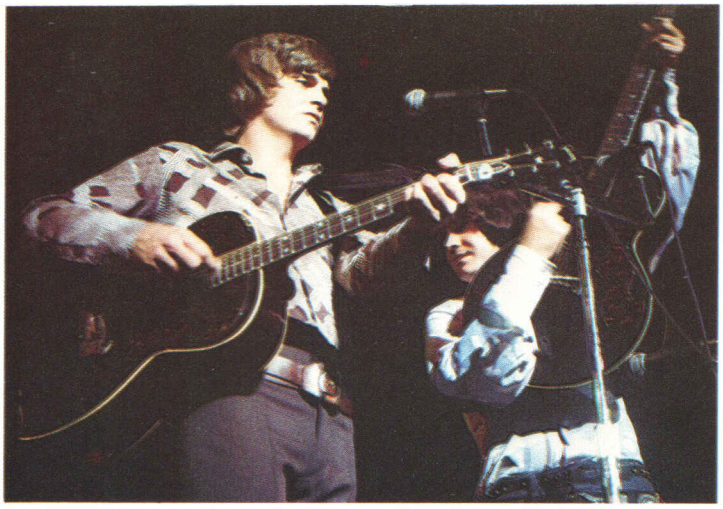
With the parting of the ways, Jack Rael was appointed their new manager, while on the debit side the Everlys lost access to the Bryants' material. This was reflected in their subsequent album, *Both Sides Of An Evening*, that relied heavily on oldies like 'Hi Lili Hi Lo', 'Wayward Wind' and 'My Gal Sal' for its content. The Everlys never again achieved the same measure of success as they had under Wesley Rose's guidance.

'Crying In The Rain', released in 1961, made the Top Ten both in America and England, but thereafter the brothers' releases gradually faded in popularity. 'That's Old Fashioned' made Number 9 and 'Don't Ask Me To Be Friends' reached Number 48, but four subsequent singles all failed to register while 'The Ferris Wheel' only made the US Number 72 in June 1964. Whether this was due to the absence of Rose at the helm, or merely a reflection of the change in popular music brought about by the 'British Invasion' is not totally clear.

The Everlys had both served a period in the US Marines in late 1961 and early 1962, but – unlike Elvis – this was not significantly to advance their showbusiness careers: a comment, perhaps on the quality of their management. Don took British actress Venetia Stevenson as his second wife in February 1962, while Phil married some eleven months later, thus becoming Archie Bleyer's son-in-law.

The mid Sixties saw the Everlys record some of the toughest rocking material of their careers on albums like *Rock'n'Soul, Beat'n'Soul* and *Two Yanks In Britain* – assisted in the latter by Yardbirds guitarist Jimmy Page – but these records went largely unappreciated. The second half of the decade saw them recording a country album, but for some reason they failed to choose this possible route to musical salvation, relying rather on appearances at Las Vegas and constantly recycling their old stage favourites.

The *Roots* album, released in 1968, preceded a switch from Warners to the RCA label, and was presented as a commentary



*Above and opposite: Into the Sixties – gone were the quiffs, replaced by Beatle-style haircuts and fringes. By the Seventies, however, Don was playing with new partners, including Albert Lee (far right). Below, from left: At a Cadence recording session in 1958; in the brothers' natural environment of jukeboxes and cola bottles; chatting with Buddy Holly; and applying the pre-show finishing touches.*

on their career, traditional songs being interspersed with transcriptions from the young Everlys' radio appearances. What the album failed to document, however, was the personal tragedies and acrimony with which the partnership had been beset in the preceding years. Don had undergone a nervous breakdown while touring England in 1963, while both brothers had undergone divorces and drug problems in the mid Sixties. These and other factors hinted that the strains of showbusiness were exacting their toll on the Everlys' relationship.

### Closing the chapter

The disagreements came to a head during a concert at Buena Park, California, on 13 July 1973. When promoter Bill Hollingshead stepped in to stop the below-par show, an angry Phil smashed his guitar on the stage and walked off. Don finished the show alone and when a member of the audience shouted 'Where's Phil?', said, 'The Everly Brothers died 10 years ago'. His comment after the show – 'It's over. I've quit. I'm tired of being an Everly Brother' – closed the chapter.

With 35 chart successes and three Number 1 hits in the US Hot Hundred, and 30 chart entries and four chart-toppers in the UK, the Everlys' record in eight years at the top of their profession is, to say the least, enviable. Their songs have since been revived by such artists as Linda Ronstadt ('When Will I Be Loved') and Bryan Ferry ('The Price Of Love'), while Dave Edmunds and Nick Lowe recorded a four-song EP of Everlys numbers as a 'thumbs-up' to the brothers.

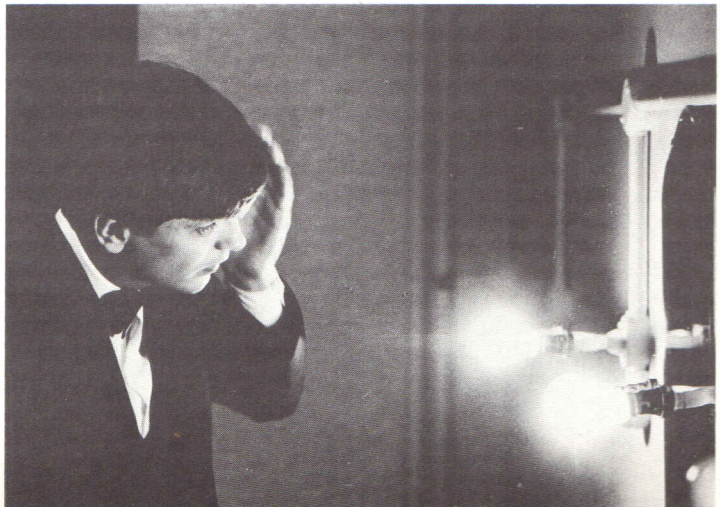
The influence of their harmony style was visible in bands as diverse as the Searchers, Hollies, Eagles and Simon and Garfunkel, and even gained the unreserved approval of veteran rocker and arch-cynic Chuck Berry: 'I didn't think Elvis Presley was as good as the Everly boys, the first time I ever laid eyes on him ... and I don't think the Beatles were as good as the Everly Brothers.'

ADAM KOMOROWSKI

**EVERLY BROTHERS**
**Discography**

**Singles**
The Sun Keeps Shining/Keep A-Lovin' Me (Columbia 21496, 1956); That's The Life I Have To Live/If Her Love Isn't True [Unreleased]; Bye Bye Love/I Wonder If I Care As Much (Cadence 1315, 1957); Wake Up Little Susie/Maybe Tomorrow (Cadence 1337, 1957); This Little Girl Of Mine/Should We Tell Him (Cadence 1342, 1958); All I Have To Do Is Dream/Claudette (Cadence 1348, 1958); Bird Dog/Devoted To You (Cadence 1350, 1958); Problems/Love Of My Life (Cadence, 1355, 1958); Take A Message To Mary/Poor Jenny (Cadence 1364, 1959); Til I Kissed You/Oh What A Feeling (Cadence 1369, 1959); Let It Be Me/Since You Broke My Heart (Cadence 1376, 1959); When Will I Be Loved/Be-Bop-A-Lula (Cadence 1380, 1960); Like Strangers/Brand New Heartache (Cadence 1388, 1960); I'm Here To Get My Baby Out Of Jail/Lightning Express (Cadence 1429, 1962); Cathy's Clown/Always It's You (Warner Bros 5151, 1960); So Sad/Lucille (Warner Bros 5163, 1960); Walk Right Back/ Ebony Eyes (Warner Bros 5199, 1961); Temptation/Stick With Me Baby (Warner Bros 5220, 1961); Everly Brothers' Souvenir Sampler (Warner Bros Pro 135, 1961); Don't Blame Me/Muskrat [plus edited versions of Walk Right Back and Lucille] (Warner Bros 5501, 1961)*; Crying In The Rain/I'm Not Angry (Warner Bros 5250, 1961); That's Old Fashioned/How Can I Meet Her (Warner Bros 5273, 1962); Don't Ask Me To Be Friends/No One Can Make My Sunshine Smile (Warner Bros 5297, 1962); (So It Was ... So It Is) So It Always Will Be/Nancy's Minuet (Warner Bros 5346, 1963); It's Been Nice (Goodnight)/I'm Afraid (Warner Bros 5362, 1963); Love Her/The Girl Who Sang The Blues (Warner Bros 5389, 1963); Ain't That Lovin' You, Baby/Hello Amy (Warner Bros 5422, 1964); The Ferris Wheel/Don't Forget To Cry (Warner Bros 5441, 1964); You're The One I Love/Ring Around My Rosie (Warner Bros 5466, 1964); Gone Gone Gone/Torture (Warner Bros 5478, 1964); That'll Be The Day/Give Me A Sweetheart (Warner Bros 5611, 1965); You're My Girl/Don't Let The Whole World Know (Warner Bros 5600, 1965); The Price Of Love/It Only Costs A Dime (Warner Bros 5628, 1965); I'll Never Get Over You/Follow Me (Warner Bros 5639, 1965); Love Is Strange/Man With Money (Warner Bros 5649, 1965); It's All Over/I Used To Love You (Warner Bros 5682, 1965); The Doll House Is Empty/Lovey Kravezit (Warner Bros 5698, 1966); (You've Got) The Power Of Love/Leave My Girl Alone (Warner Bros 5808, 1966); Hard Hard Year/Somebody Help Me (Warner Bros 5833, 1966); Fifi The Flea [solo by Don]/Like Everytime Before [solo by Phil] (Warner Bros 5758, 1967); The Devil's Child/She Never Smiles Any More (Warner Bros 5901, 1967); Bowling Green/I Don't Want To Love You (Warner Bros 7020, 1967); Mary Jane/Talking To The Flowers (Warner Bros 7062, 1967); Love Of The Common People/A Voice Within (Warner Bros 7088, 1967); It's My Time/Empty Boxes (Warner Bros 7192, 1968); Milk Train/Lord Of The Manor (Warner Bros 7226, 1968); Everly Family Show (1952) Part One/Part Two (Warner Bros Pro 306, 1968); T For Texas/I Wonder If I Care As Much (Re-recorded) (Warner Bros 7262, 1969); I'm On My Way Home Again/Cuckoo Bird (Warner Bros 7290, 1969); Carolina In My Mind/My Little Yellow Bird (Warner Bros 7326, 1969); Yves/Human Race (Warner Bros 7425, 1970).
*A Warner Brothers extended single

**Albums** (selective)
*The Everly Brothers* (Cadence 3003); *Songs Our Daddy Taught Us* (Cadence 3016); *Golden Hits Of The Everly Brothers* (Warner Bros 1471); *Roots* (Warner Bros 1752).



# Country Tunesmiths

## Would the Everlys have tasted success without the songs of the Bryants?

MORE THAN ANY OTHER SONGWRITERS, Boudleaux and Felice Bryant caught the aspirations and anxieties of WASP teenagers during the mid Fifties, and it is surprising that their achievement has been so little remarked. They are among the great songwriting teams of the Fifties, along with Leiber and Stoller, and Pomus and Shuman.

Boudleaux Bryant was born in Shellman, Georgia, on 13 February 1920. In his teens he studied as a concert violinist and by 1938 was accomplished enough to play a season with the Atlanta Philharmonic, a career that came to an end when he flirted with jazz. He drifted up to Milwaukee, where in due course he met Felice. She had been born in that same city on 7 August 1925 and when Boudleaux stepped into her life she had got no further than a job as lift operator at the Shrader Hotel. The couple married and promptly began writing songs together.

The first fruit of the Bryants' professional partnership was 'Country Boy' which they sent to Fred Rose of Acuff-Rose Publishing in Nashville. Rose placed the song with Little Jimmy Dickens and it proved a considerable success on Columbia in 1949. It was widely covered; indeed, crossovers from country to the R&B or mainstream popular markets became common practice with Bryant compositions. 'Have A Good Time', for example, received a blues styling from Atlantic's Ruth Brown and reached a sophisticated mainstream audience courtesy of crooner Tony Bennett. Both versions came out in 1952 and evinced an embittered, clever quality not usually associated with the Bryants' later work. 'Have your fling', ran the lyric, 'Be gay with your new love', adding with dubious magnanimity, 'I'm setting you free. Dance and pretend it's true love!'

In 1950 the Bryants had moved to Nashville, and their career as country writers continued with growing success –they supplied Eddy Arnold with two hits in 1955 ('I've Been Thinking' and 'The Richest Man'), for example–but the most important pointer to the future lay in their ability to provide songs for a wider audience than the committed country fans. Mitch Miller, a Columbia A&R man, encouraged his mainstream artists to use Bryant songs: during 1953 there were two versions of the Bryants' 'Hey Joe', both on Columbia – Carl Smith sang it as pure country while Frankie Laine's cover version raced up the popular charts.

*Above: The Bryants deliberate before answering questions during a radio interview. Left: Felice Bryant.*

### Down to Tennessee

The big break came in 1956. Boudleaux had sat down with Chet Atkins three years earlier and written a country ballad, 'How's The World Treating You?'. It was intended for Eddy Arnold, but when Elvis Presley cut it as an album track in 1956, the Bryants were brought into contact with a lucrative teenage market.

Boudleaux and Felice were never slow to pick up on trends and they saw that they could score in a wider market than pure country. They had a genuine sympathy for the new youth culture and the emerging sounds of rock'n'roll. Boudleaux

had already written some country pop for Columbia's Bobby Lord back in 1954, and in 1956 the team were even able to give him material akin to rockabilly in 'Beautiful Baby', an unusual mixture of a song which showed how the Bryants understood the idiom and the thin line it steered between sentimental cliché and downhome raunchiness. Everything about 'Beautiful Baby', from its blues-based double line to its lyrical moaning about a mean little mama, was skilfully calculated. The same tough sensibility informed 'Too Many', a pungent rockabilly composition occupying that middle ground between Hank Williams and Carl Perkins which the Bryants gave to Wiley Barkdull and the black singer Ocie Smith during 1957. Smith's record emerged on Cadence and it was with that label that the Bryants enjoyed most success. Between 1957 and 1960 they racked up eleven massive hits for the Everly Brothers and created a new country genre for teenagers.

**The great years**

Smooth rockers like 'Bye Bye Love' (1957) examined the agonies of exclusion, jealousy and adolescent despair, while 'Problems' (1958) spoke for the harassed teenager caught between demanding parents, critical teachers and difficult girlfriends. 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' (1958) flipped the coin to present the euphoria of adolescent love. Every song provided opportunity for close harmony singing and was neatly, if simply, constructed. Verses were repeated with few changes before the bridge and, invariably, the title line would supply a superb hook. If songs like 'Devoted To You', 'Love Of My Life' (1958) and 'Like Strangers' (1960) now seem overeffusive about true love and destiny, well, there was always the elegance of 'Raining In My Heart' (1958) which they wrote for Buddy Holly or the magisterial passion of 'Love Hurts' (1961) which went initially to Roy Orbison.

With 'Wake Up Little Susie' (1957), 'Bird Dog' (1958) and 'Poor Jenny' (1959) the Bryants dealt with some central preoccupations of US teenagers–preoccupations which other songwriters soon latched onto. The gentlest was 'Wake Up Little Susie', a wry little tale tangled up with the tight morality of small-town USA. It described an anxious youngster shaking his girl awake, horrified because they'd fallen asleep all night and ruined their reputations. 'Bird Dog' was altogether tougher, as if the Coasters had become good ol' boys with straws jammed in their faces and were casting sidelong salacious glances at a kid so bad he even made it with teacher. What a dog! As for 'Poor Jenny', that was a richly comic rocker about the disasters that befell a girl on her first date, not so 'black' as 'Bird Dog' but in the tradition that spawned Eddie Cochran's 'Weekend'.

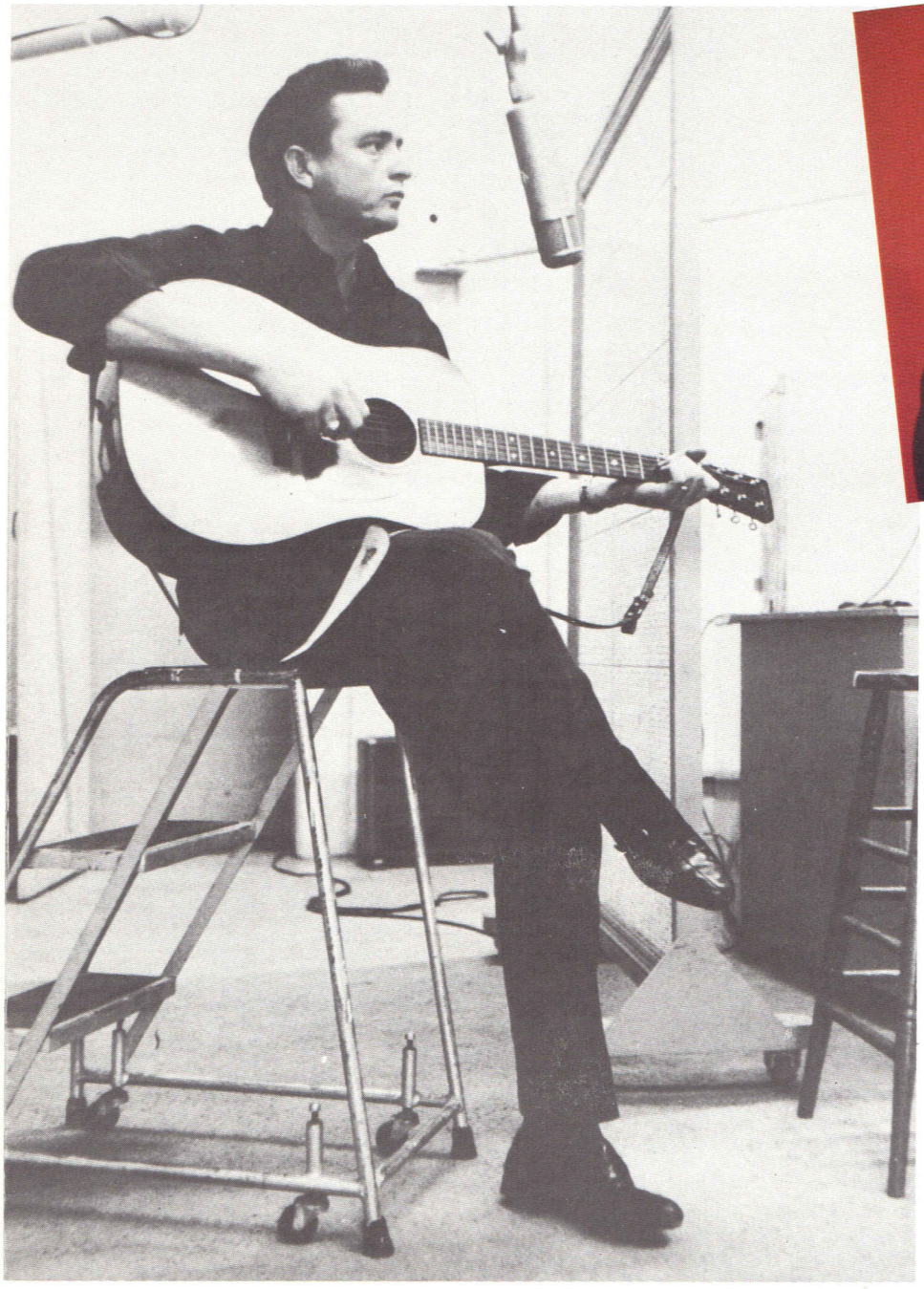
By the time Warner Brothers bought the Everly Brothers' contract Don and Phil were proficient tunesmiths in the Bryant style. Equally significant was their departure from Acuff-Rose: 'We needed more freedom. One of the sad consequences of splitting with Wesley [Rose] was that we were no longer able to get Boudleaux's songs.' This ended the Bryants' greatest period. In addition, a new breed of songwriters was coming into its own; the tunesmiths who were to reshape pop music in the early Sixties – Bernie Lowe and Kal Mann, Gerry Goffin and Carole King, Hal David and Burt Bacharach, Berry Gordy, Smokey Robinson, Lamont Dozier, Brian and Eddie Holland. These writers would meet the needs of cosmopolitan city kids with conveyor-belt precision, and the Bryants' style seemed old-fashioned and somewhat uncommercial in comparison.

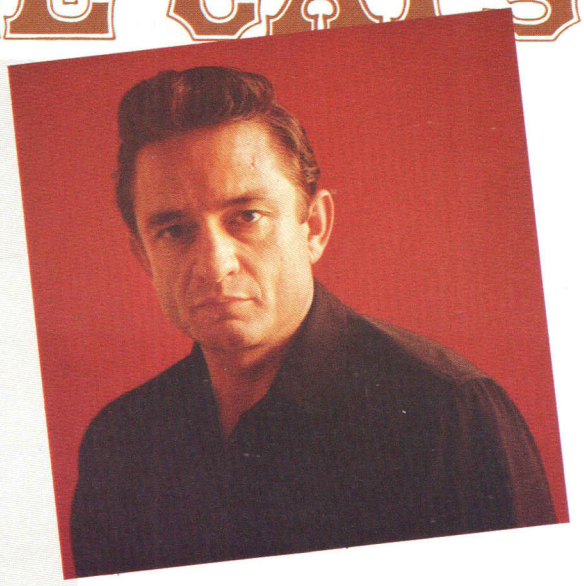
Good professionals like Boudleaux and Felice would not be discouraged easily, however, and hits continued with Bob Luman's 'Let's Think About Living', Bob Moore's 'Mexico' (1960), Al Hirt's 'Theme From A Dream' (1963), Sonny James' 'Baltimore' (1964), the Everly Brothers' 'Rocky Top' (1972), Roy Clark's 'Come Live With Me' (1973) and Chet Atkins' 'I Can Hear Kentucky Calling Me' (1981). The Bryant catalogue continues to be reworked. 'Bye Bye Love', for instance, has scored for Roy Orbison (1960), Ray Charles (1962), Simon and Garfunkel (1970), and Moe Bandy with Joe Stampley (1979) while 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' has been resurrected by Roy Orbison (1960), Richard Chamberlain (1963), Glen Campbell and Bobbie Gentry (1969) and Johnny Nash (1976). The songs of Boudleaux and Felice Bryant remain a monument to rock's connection to its country roots.

CLIVE ANDERSON

*Top: Felice with country star Dolly Parton. Above: The Bryants holding success in their hands. Right: Boudleaux Bryant.*

# NASHVILLE CATS





*Above and left: Johnny Cash, one of the most successful country singers; his career owes much to the popular appeal of the 'Nashville sound'.*

## The producers and musicians who made country music a multi-million-dollar industry

When John Sebastian wrote about the 'thirteen-hundred-and-fifty-two guitar-pickers in Nashville' for the Lovin' Spoonful's 1966 hit, 'Nashville Cats', it probably seemed as though there really were that many musicians making a living in the city's recording studios. At this time, Nashville was rapidly emerging as 'Music City USA', and had become a serious rival to the traditional musical centres of America. In 1964, for instance, *Time* magazine carried an article headlined 'Nashville is Cashville': 'Today, country is no longer a whoop'n'holler hoedown, it is a bristling 100 million-dollar industry. Nashville's 21 recording studios produce 30 per cent of the nation's hit singles.'

The late Fifties and early Sixties saw an increasing media awareness of the 'Nashville sound', a phrase used to describe a new style of lush, professional-sounding country music that emerged in the wake of the rock'n'roll explosion. Pop and rock singers began recording in Nashville, from Elvis Presley through the Everly Brothers to Perry Como. Country singers, too, were having worldwide pop music hits with country songs: Jim Reeves ('He'll Have To Go'), Patsy Cline ('I Fall To Pieces'), Eddy Arnold ('Make The World Go Away') and Johnny Cash ('Ring Of Fire'). Nashville was traditionally the political and commercial centre of the state of Tennessee, and its major businesses were insurance and banking. The National Life Insurance company owned the radio station, WSM ('We Shield Millions'), that had relayed the 'Grand Ole Opry' country music show since 1925, but music was only a small part of the city's commercial life and a part many people had hitherto looked down on.

### Music on the move

Apart from the Opry, there was little or no music business in Nashville until a few small independent record labels, such as Bullet, Tennessee and Nashboro, and publishing companies, notably Acuff-Rose and Cedarwood, opened up in the postwar years. The labels initially put out as much pop music or blues and gospel as they did country. At first they recorded in makeshift studios in the downtown area but during the Fifties they began the move out to the residential areas around 16th Avenue which became the centre of the Nashville music industry. Following the lead of the independents, the major record companies began to show an interest in the city: in 1950 Capitol opened a studio and over the next few years the other majors set up recording outlets there. They came to play a large part in consolidating the Nashville sound, although, of course, they did not invent it.

A major factor in the development of a distinctive sound was the emergence of rock'n'roll itself: the massive success of this new music during the mid-Fifties edged traditional country music out of the limelight. The careers of many country

musicians suffered as a result and some were brought to a virtual halt. As part of a readjustment in the wake of rock'n'roll, the Nashville music industry changed the sound of country music. The instruments that had made the old country sound – banjos, fiddles, autoharps, steel guitars – became less important. They were replaced or supplemented by, on the one hand, the electric guitar, bass and drums, instrumentation of rock'n'roll, and, on the other, by strings, brass and large-scale vocal arrangements – elements far removed from Fifties rock. The sentimental ballad became the staple country song, while other, more progressive, elements of country music were either relegated to commercial obscurity or moved towards rock'n'roll, becoming rockabilly in the process.

The Nashville studios played a major role in taking country music out of its rural past and making it commercially acceptable. Consequently the old folk heritage of country was largely lost, to be replaced by a pop synthesis that was accessible to the nation as a whole. The success of Nashville in this transformation was such that the Nashville sound came to be judged as *the* country sound rather than being merely a part of country music.

That Nashville was the centre of a new-style country music came about because a number of producers saw the financial possibilities of such a development. Allied to this was the growth in the number of recording studios in Nashville in the period just after the Second World War. Working around the studios was a small group of talented musicians who moved from studio to studio to record sessions with the Nashville country stars, and for any label that wanted them. Elsewhere, sidemen were normally associated with one particular label or studio. But the presence of this pool of sessionmen gave all the studios in Nashville a basic similarity of sound.

**Playing by numbers**

Because of the informal nature of the music and the fact that many of the musicians played 'by ear', a musical shorthand was evolved that substituted numbers for notes. 'Nashville notation' provided a picture of the chord progression of a song, enabling the individual player to improvise parts to fit the skeleton. As a result of all this, relaxed but professional sessions resulted; a producer could be sure of not only reaching his target of four songs but of getting a creative, fresh-sounding record as well. These 'head' arrangements were the key, according to RCA A&R man Steve Sholes: 'Few Nashville sessionmen read music,' he commented, 'and those who can don't let it interfere with their performance.'

The standard instrumental line-up in Nashville in the late Fifties usually comprised drums, bass, piano and acoustic and electric guitars. An unusually powerful bass sound was often gained by doubling up a six-string bass guitar with an upright string bass.

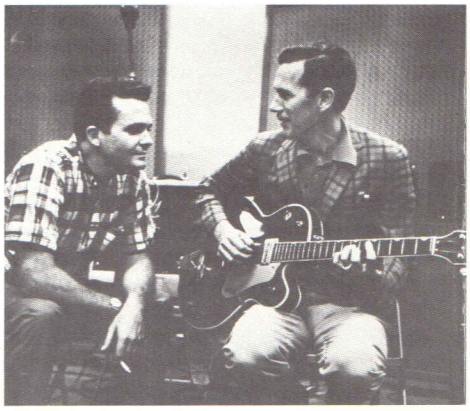
In order to retain the 'country' feel, steel guitar and fiddle were sometimes used to supplement the electric guitar as front-line instruments. Nevertheless, all instrumentation was subordinate to the vocalist. Country was, after all, primarily about story-telling: the music was purely a backing to the words, although Nashville producers knew when a tricky little lick or guitar run was needed to 'sell' a tune behind the lyric.

Among the key 'Nashville sound' musicians were bass player Bob Moore, first of the city's musicians to use the electric bass guitar, guitarist Hank Garland, who played a jazzy yet simple style, drummer Buddy Harman and pianist Floyd Cramer. Cramer was one of the most widely-used Nashville sessioneers in the Fifties and in 1960 it was estimated that he played on over a quarter of the hit singles that came from the city. The employment of saxophonist Boots Randolph was also important in widening the range of instrumentation on Nashville sessions.

These musicians would be found after-hours at the Carousel night club, playing jazz for relaxation. Although Nashville did not make heavy musical demands on its musicians, their professional ability ensured that Nashville singers got the best backing country music could provide. Understandably, aspiring country stars saw Nashville as the capital of their music.

**The pickin' producer**

Besides the sessionmen, the other vital ingredient in the actual creation of the Nashville sound was the work of the producers who pulled the elements together. And among them, the name of Chet Atkins stands out. Born in the Clinch Mountains of Tennessee, Atkins worked as staff guitarist on various radio stations before signing for the Bullet label in 1946; in 1950 he moved to Nashville and signed for RCA. Through RCA, he met Steve Sholes, the Company's Artist and Repertoire man for country and blues recordings. Atkins was an extremely talented guitarist, whose first solo album was released in 1953, but it was as an organiser and producer that he had most influence. Sholes used Atkins as his local contact for setting up recordings and hiring musicians, and when RCA built a new studio in



*Guitarist Chet Atkins is pictured with pianist Floyd Cramer and saxophonist Boots Randolph (above), and in the studio with record producer Jim Molloy (above right). The famous Carousel Club (right), was the after-hours haunt of Nashville's sessionmen.*

Nashville, Atkins was assigned to record production. This appointment quickly resulted in hits like 'Oh Lonesome Me' and 'I Can't Stop Loving You' for Don Gibson.

Atkins' production credits encompassed country stars like Hank Snow, rockabillies like Elvis Presley and country-popsters like Jim Reeves. He also continued to record a series of instrumental guitar albums in country, pop and classical styles, and set about a broader approach to country music. By 'sweetening' the sound with strings, voices and horns, he convinced pop artists like Al Hirt and Perry Como that they should record in Nashville. Another important figure was Billy Sherrill who rose to prominence in the Sixties and Seventies in Nashville. Sherrill had started his career as an R&B producer but moved over during the early Sixties to country music, where his careful mixing of country elements with orchestral instrumentation created a particularly smooth sound. His name is most often associated with Tammy Wynette and Tanya Tucker.

But the man probably more responsible than any for creating the Nashville sound was Owen Bradley. Like Atkins, he was a native of Tennessee and gained a good musical education in Nashville. Before branching into the business of running a recording studio he had led the staff band of WSM radio and had been its musical director from 1940 to 1958. When he built his first studio in the downtown area in 1952, the only precedents were the WSM radio studios, the Castle Studios run by three radio engineers as a sideline, and the Brown Brothers transcription studio. During the early Fifties, however, the demand for studios was increasing. There were more small labels, like Dot, Republic and Hickory, and the big companies were preparing to come to town.

**Laying the foundation**

In 1954 Bradley made a deal with Decca to build a new studio out on 16th Avenue, away from the downtown area. A hut was erected at the back of a house on this hitherto-residential street. There the Nashville sound was to develop to such an extent that today the area houses all the major record corporations and many lesser ones and is known as 'Music Row'. The old hut is still there, with Columbia's large office block constructed around it. It typifies the Nashville studio: small, intimate and homely in decor.

*Country producer Don Law (below) and vocal harmony group the Anita Kerr Singers (bottom).*

Bradley's Decca productions – with Brenda Lee ('Sweet Nothin's') and Patsy Cline ('Walking After Midnight') – were even lusher than Atkins'. While Atkins experimented more with instrumentation, Bradley's pop hits by country singers Jimmy Newman ('A Fallen Star') and Bobby Helms ('Jingle Bell Rock') tended towards heavy vocal arrangements. If the voices did not belong to the Jordanaires, famous as Elvis' back-up group, then they almost certainly belonged to the ubiquitous Anita Kerr Singers. Kerr's group was an act in its own right, but worked most frequently in the recording studios, enhancing many records but, unfortunately, quite often drowning others. Overvocalisation was the first excess of the Nashville sound, although the technique could, at times, be most effective.

Bradley's studio was purchased in 1961 by Columbia Records' Don Law, a non-musician who contributed much to Nashville by recording pop hits with many of Columbia's country artists. These included Marty Robbins ('El Paso'), Johnny Horton ('North To Alaska'), Lefty Frizzell ('Long Black Veil') and, most successfully, Johnny Cash. During the Sixties, as Bradley, Atkins and Law asserted themselves with hit after hit, Nashville grew to be almost an independent colony of the major recording corporations of New York and Los Angeles. It grew so much, in fact, that it ceased to rely on those corporations.

**Country crossovers**

Country music had hitherto rarely reached the pop market, but in the Sixties the terms 'crossover' or 'country-politan' were coined to describe the frequent Hot Hundred successes of Jim Reeves, Johnny Cash and the rest. The Nashville sound had so broadened the audience for country music that country artists like Loretta Lynn, George Jones, Roger Miller and Tammy Wynette gained a far wider audience than hitherto.

In the Seventies, a rival music to the Nashville sound developed in the so-called 'outlaw' music of Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson. But the Nashville sound remains, if not so much in a musical style, then certainly as a concept and a way of life. The 'thirteen-hundred-and-fifty-two guitar-pickers' are still there, as is the uniquely relaxed studio system. The record labels, the publishers, the producers and the stars have continued to reap the rewards from their successful exploitation of the country music that characterises the capital of the state of Tennessee.

MARTIN HAWKINS

# At The Hop

## White doo-wop: close harmonies and corny lyrics

WHITE VOCAL GROUPS of the Fifties embraced a variety of styles and sounds, ranging from adult pop groups (the Ames Brothers, the Four Aces, the Hilltoppers), through shameless pop-rockers who covered the R&B hits of the day (the Crewcuts, the McGuire Sisters, the Diamonds) to a vast army of teenage singing groups who naturally absorbed black vocal mannerisms. Some, like the Skyliners and the Belmonts, rivalled the best black harmony groups but, before the emergence of such quartets, white doo-wop was synonymous with plagiarism and what might be termed 'sham-rock'.

The king of sham-rock was Bill Randle, a Cleveland disc jockey who discovered the Crewcuts and the Diamonds, the two most successful doo-wop groups of the entire decade. Alan Freed's arch-rival, Randle took the Crewcuts to Mercury records in 1954. Originating from Toronto, the group had previously been known as the Canadaires and comprised: John Perkins (lead), Pat Barrett (tenor), Rudy Maugeri (baritone) and Ray Perkins (bass). The Crewcuts covered a variety of R&B hits including those by the Chords ('Sh-Boom'), the Queens ('Oop Shoop'), the Penguins ('Earth Angel'), Nappy Brown ('Don't Be Angry') and Clyde McPhatter ('Seven Days'). They notched up 11 Top Twenty hits in two years.

Like the Crewcuts, whose career they so closely followed, the Diamonds also came from Canada where Ted Kowalski (tenor), Phil Letitt (baritone) and Bill Reed (bass) attended the University of Toronto. In 1954 they auditioned for CBC-TV's 'Now Is Your Chance' and met David Somerville, who joined them as lead singer. After a couple of flops on the Coral record label they approached Randle, who placed them with Mercury and picked their songs, including the Teenagers' 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love'.

The Diamonds had a safe, successful formula from which they rarely strayed, grabbing songs which had just broken onto the R&B chart, recording them quickly with a slicker production and selling millions of copies to people who had never heard the originals. Between 1956 and 1961 they ripped off R&B hits by the Willows ('Church Bells May Ring'), the

*White doo-wop promoter Bill Randle (left) and his most successful discovery, the Diamonds (below).*

Clovers ('Love Love Love'), the G-Clefs ('Ka Ding Dong'), the Heartbeats ('A Thousand Miles Away'), the Gladiolas ('Little Darlin"), the Rays, the Solitaires and the Danleers.

**R&B versus royalties**

The Crewcuts and the Diamonds looked like rock'n'roll groups and, superficially, sounded like rock'n'roll groups. All they lacked was the feel and creativity of the black groups they squeezed off the pop charts. But while these cover versions suppressed black performers, they also brought royalties to black songwriters who preferred a million-selling pop hit to an R&B hit which reached less than 10 per cent of the record-buying public.

Most of the better white groups came from the Northeast – New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania. There was a depth to the East Coast vocal group tradition that the rest of the country lacked. The Orioles, a black group, enjoyed a string of Top Ten R&B hits between 1948 and 1953. Hugely popular in New York, they left a solid heritage to which kids of all races could aspire. Generally, the East Coast produced the best black vocal groups. R&B band leader Johnny Otis remarked: 'On the East, they have such nice harmonies, musically, artistically ... but dear friends like the Penguins, the Medallions and those other West Coast groups were horrible. I used to talk to my bassman and my trumpet player and we used to say, "There must be something here in the water that causes that".'

The direct influence of these great black singing units was, then, one reason why white groups on the East Coast were so good. But equally important was social and racial background. White groups from the West Coast were usually over-privileged kids who sang and surfed in equal proportions. From the Four Preps through the Fleetwoods to the Beach Boys, theirs were pretty, summery sounds.

White doo-wop's best exponents sprang from lower status minorities. By WASP standards, 'white' is really a misnomer since it was the Italian, Hispanic and Polish kids who took to the subways in search of the perfect echo. Many of the Puerto Ricans, next to the blacks the lowest on the social scale, were recruited from street gangs and black/Puerto Rican combinations, like Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, were not uncommon.

Of all these ethnic groups, the Italians were the most important. From New York, the Three Chuckles, led by Teddy Randazzo, brushed the charts with 'Runaround' (Number 20 in 1954), 'Two Times I Love You (1955) and 'And The Angels Sing' (1956). In a similar vein, the Four Lovers from Newark, New Jersey, made the Hot Hundred with 'You're The Apple Of My Eye' (1956); some years later they re-emerged as the Four Seasons.

**Coast-to-coast chorus**

By 1957, white doo-woppers were coming from all over the country. The Crescendos, from Nashville, Tennessee, grappled with 'Oh Julie' (Number 5) and the Silva-Tones from Texas enjoyed a smaller but oft-recorded hit with 'That's All I Want From You'. The year 1957 also saw the emergence of the Del-Vikings, a racially-integrated unit who hit with 'Come Go With Me' and 'Whispering Bells'.

Danny and the Juniors were one of the most successful, if not the most talented of white groups. They topped the charts with 'At The Hop' in 1958, proclaimed that 'Rock And Roll Is Here To Stay' (Number 19 in 1958) and reached the Hot Hundred with another seven records. Formed in Philadelphia, the group, comprising Dave White, Frank Maffei, Joe Terranova and lead singer Danny Rapp, took their material to Artie Singer, a vocal coach who owned Singular records. Singer liked 'Do The Bop', changed the title on the advice of Dick Clark (of 'American Bandstand') and copied the piano introduction from 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On'. After the group appeared on 'Bandstand', ABC-Paramount bought the master and 'At The Hop' sold two-and-a-half million.

Dick Clark was equally responsible for the fortunes of the Crests, an integrated group with an Italian-American lead singer, Johnny Maestro, whose creamy tenor reached the Hot Hundred on 10 occasions between 1957 and 1960. After 'Sweetest One' (on Joyce) they signed to George Paxton's Coed label and went to Number 2 with 'Sixteen Candles'. Dick Clark, who bought the publishing rights, plugged the Crests repeatedly, but their success owed something to their talent and was not entirely manufactured.

The progress of white vocal groups gathered momentum throughout 1958.

Many of the hottest sellers – the Playmates ('Beep Beep') and the Kalin Twins ('When') – were immediate anachronisms with sickly and contrived orchestrations. Others, including the Aquatones' 'You' (Number 21), the Elegants' 'Little Star' (1), Dion and the Belmonts' 'I Wonder Why' (22), the Teddy Bears' 'To Know Him Is To Love Him' (1) and the Slades' 'You Cheated' (42) retain a charm and freshness which permits repeated listening.

**White to black**

The story of the Slades from Austin, Texas, does much to undermine the belief that white groups cribbed all the best R&B discs. They went to the Domino record label where they cut 'You Cheated' written by lead singer Don Burch. The disc was covered by the Shields, a black Los Angeles aggregation whose imitation far outsold the original.

In 1959 the contribution to the white doo-wop bonanza was as mixed as before. Despite insipid harmonies, the Fleetwoods, a trio from Olympia, Washington, racked up 11 hits between 1959 and 1963. The Impalas (an integrated group with three Italians and a black lead singer) hit Number 2 with 'Sorry I Ran All The Way Home' while the Mystics, the Passions and the Fire-flies brought 'Hushabye', 'Just To Be With You' and 'You Were Mine' to the charts. Pittsburgh's Skyliners, famous for a stunning lead singer in Jimmy Beaumont and a massive, much-revived hit, 'Since I Don't Have You', are often regarded as the most sophisticated of white doo-woppers.

Recorded for Al Capozzi's Calico label, 'Since I Don't Have You' (Number 12 in 1959) was the first successful R&B-oriented disc to use a string section. Dreamy orchestrations accompanied the group on records for Colpix, Cameo and Atco, all of which were notable releases.

White doo-wop reached epidemic proportions between 1960 and 1962 when the Hot Hundred was riddled with discs by the Innocents, the Roomates, the Classics, Donnie and the Dreamers, the Capris, the Regents (who recorded the original 'Barbara Ann'), the Chimes, the Tokens, Rosie and the Originals and a dozen others, including integrated teams like the Marcels and the Time-Tones. A New Jersey craze for acappella (unaccompanied) singing provided white doo-wop's final, pure but short-lived gasps during 1963–64.

**Salute to a sound**

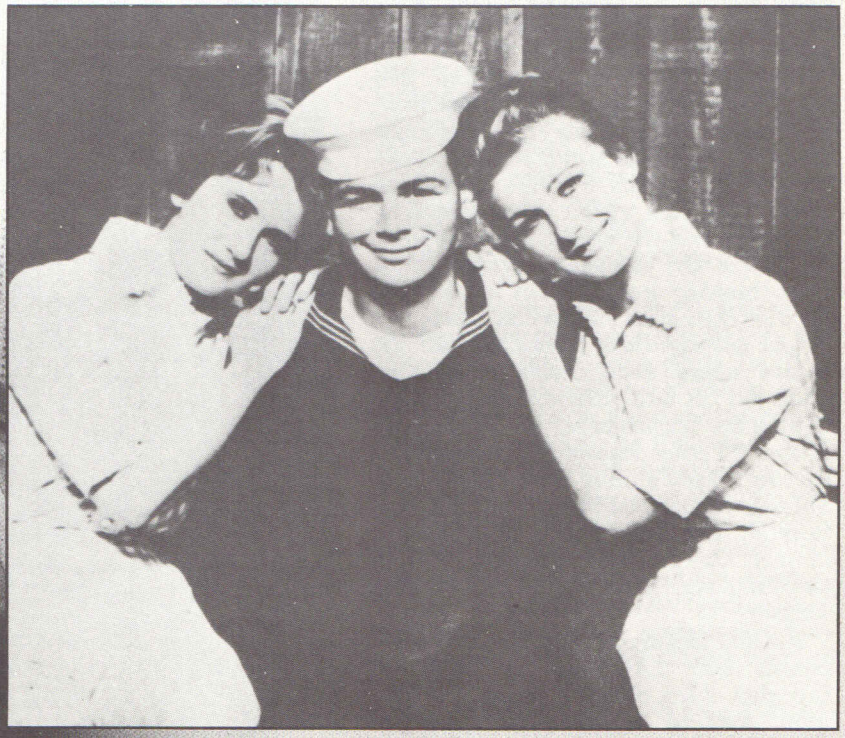
The English invasion halted white doo-wop overnight. Apart from the occasional throwback (for example, the Casinos who scored with 'Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye' in 1967), the style was simply wiped out of existence. Vito and the Salutations mourned its departure with the unsuccessful 'Liverpool Bound' : 'I don't wanna hold your hand/I just wanna go diddle it dit, diddle it dit, dip dip dip .... !' When Americans recovered from the Beatles, indigenous ethnic groups had lost the doo-wop touch. Vocal/instrumental combos – the Standells, the Kingsmen and many more – regurgitated black music in less attractive ways.

The subject-matter of white doo-wop lacked variety and the lyrics were often poor. Ignoring the candid language of earlier black groups, love and desire were rarely expressed by sexual metaphor. Lyrics were romantic, sugar-coated and coy, filling a need which groups like the Osmonds satisfied in the mid-Seventies.

But white doo-wop groups often used four- or five-part harmony to its best advantage, and some of the lead singers were superb: in Jimmy Beaumont (Skyliners), Dion Di Mucci (Belmonts) and Johnny Maestro (Crests), the idiom produced the finest vocalists of their generation. Allowing for a self-conscious lack of humour, these were exceptionally talented singers by any standards.

There was a keen edge to their voices, a purity of tone which escaped many of the black singers they idolised. And despite the increasing segregation of R&B radio playlists, most of the nationally successful white doo-woppers dented the R&B chart with their first hit; as new and totally unknown performers, R&B stations simply couldn't tell what colour they were.

BILL MILLAR



*Above: Album sleeves of the Skyliners (left) and the Regents. Below: The Crewcuts work out vocal harmonies in the recording studio (centre), flanked by the Italian-American group the Crests (left) and West Coast doo-wop trio the Fleetwoods (right).*

## The dilemmas of sex and romance in Fifties rock

*The screen door slams/Mary's dress waves/ Like a vision she dances across the porch/ As the radio plays/Roy Orbison singin' for the lonely/That's me and I love you only/ Don't turn me home again/I just can't face myself alone again.*

*Don't you run back inside, darlin'/You know just what I'm here for/So you're scared and you're thinkin'/That maybe we ain't that young anymore/Well, show a little faith!/There's magic in the night/You ain't a beauty, but you're alright/And that's alright by me . . .*

That's Bruce Springsteen's intro to his 1975 'Thunder Road' – a perfectly updated encapsulation of what the dreams of Fifties rock'n'roll meant to a generation, penned by the performer who is now a living symbol of those dreams as not just a past but as the promise of hope for the future. It's a joyous, celebratory song about something serious: the visceral delights and dangers of everyday living. But *would* it have been written without Roy Orbison's 'Only The Lonely', a UK/US hit in 1960?

Operatically morose, professionally alienated, 'Only The Lonely' was one of many songs which spoke directly to the particular angst of the diary-scribbling, lovelorn, parent-plagued teenager in the late Fifties and early Sixties. (*'Only the lonely/Know the way I feel tonight'*, Orbison's tremendous voice trembles, *'Only the lonely/Know this feeling ain't right!'*).

It was an insecure era, huddling under the shadow of the Bomb and arming itself with falsies, tight sweaters, textured car upholstery, Technicolor, cherry picker tables and dry martinis, Madison Avenue, bridge parties and organdy aprons, spit curls and stilettoes, girdles and letter sweaters in order to fight off a pervasive sense of emptiness and unease.

The mid-Fifties rock explosion had given teenagers a sense of group identity. But though they knew they belonged together, there was still a sense of something pushing them. Pushing them to be 'popular', to look 'right', to be wanted by the One True Love; and, at the same time, there was the immense pressure most right-thinking teens felt not to stray too far from the norms expected at home.

And not just *their* homes, but all the homes whose recognisable rules they could see set out each week in the blue light of the television set: on 'Leave It To Beaver', 'Father Knows Best', 'Ozzie and Harriet', 'Lassie' and 'The Lucy Show'. These family-format shows were so classically all-American in their moral stance, in fact, that they would have enjoyed successful runs in the Old Salem of Cotton Mather.

Sex and adolescent rebellion may have reared their ugly heads in 1956, but thoughts of sex plus the pressure to conform equalled confusion, a confusion which came out clearly in rock music, expressed as the classic problem of romance – what it was and how it was connected to nasty physical sex. The sexes still didn't know quite how to 'relate' to each other: wise girls knew they had to shoulder the burden of keeping the 'irresponsible' opposite sex in line. They read leaflets called 'Growing Up and Liking It' which warned (euphemistically) of the cyclical upheavals of puberty, and devoured tomes like Amy Vanderbilt's *Etiquette For Teens*. Such books stressed when to wear white gloves, how to get a date (join clubs and church organisations, find a hobby), and how to avoid 'heavy petting' ('Keep telling jokes – remember, it's hard to kiss a laughing girl!').

The collective wisdom handed down via Big Sister was simpler: if 'he' tried to go 'parking', just keep your seat next to the window and lift both legs onto the front seat as the headlamps were switched off – so the would-be Romeo would find a pair of stiletto heels in front of his face.

*Top: Paul Anka – sultry good looks and sentimental ballads.*

The sexuality of pure rock'n'roll was, like all eroticism, an excitement aroused through conflict and tensions. Many of these tensions were merely a case of the sound colliding with the psyche of the era – symbolising rebellion in conflict with authority, tradition with novelty, 'good taste' with vulgarity, 'respect' with abandon.

Teen listeners of the late Fifties had been raised on a musical diet of melodrama and sentiment, with the occasional novelty number or Christmas carol thrown in. So the effect of rock'n'roll on them had been immense and intense – something akin to the physical traumas of puberty. This audience was, after all, mobile – it was a car culture, a high-school hierarchy, jumping in juke-joints, coffee bars and private parties to a new jive which suggested for the first time that love could have physical aspects . . . and that it might not be 'eternal' after all.

### Searching for values

Listeners had absorbed these radical differences of orientation by the time Elvis went into the army, but as they conflicted with the prevailing adult values to which good kids were supposed to aspire, it all added up to a sense of confusion and displacement. Falling in love seemed (paradoxically) more desirable in these circumstances, but once 'in love' or 'going steady', a morbid terror of losing the loved one tended to set in. It was usually founded in that conviction of personal inadequacy which persisted at the back of each acne-stricken, greasy-haired or flat-chested teenager's mind. And as more stars appeared in the teen firmament, their worshippers were likely to feel less and less adequate by comparison.

By 1958, too, the record industry was working hard at taming rock and placing

*Left: The teenage girl's dilemma: do her parents really know best or should she trust her heart? Below: It could be make believe.*

it within its own frame of reference – partly by assembling a series of solo singers in the wake of Presley. These ranged from Pat Boone (whose 'April Love' was a US Number 1 in 1958) and post-Perry Como crooners like Johnny Mathis or Matt Monro, through to those arbitrarily chosen to fit the Presley visual image (greasy hair, 'bedroom eyes' and surly features): a list that ran from the archetypal rocker in Eddie Cochran right down to Paul Anka, Frankie Avalon and Fabiano Forte (known as Fabian – he could hardly even sing). Three major British contenders emerged: the competent Cliff Richard (whose first UK Number 1, 'Livin' Doll', sent him clambering up and down and around the lyric in search of his *real* voice but proved immensely influential), Adam Faith (further fuelled by a movie debut in 1960's *Beat Girl*) and Billy Fury – an image-rocker from the stable of manager Larry Parnes.

All these singers were 'nice boys' a good girl could date and a parent would rate, just like their mainstream white American counterparts Bobby Vinton ('Roses Are Red'), Bobby Vee ('Rubber Ball', 'Take Good Care Of My Baby'), Bobby Darin ('Dream Lover') and TV star Ricky Nelson ('Young Emotion', 'Hello Mary Lou'). They purveyed the sort of youthful romance adults respected – an artificial, coded ritual where verbs like 'love', 'care', 'adore' and 'need' simply stood in for the real feelings they were originally meant to express.

**Boys keep swingin'**

Narcissism had replaced the sexual confrontation of early rock'n'roll, and melodrama further obscured the substitution: male singer-idols presented memories and dilemmas so personally that the girl was a mere prop device, almost excluded. *Her* happiness depended on him – as long as she measured up (a 'Venus in Blue Jeans') and stayed true, unlike Del Shannon's splendid 'Runaway' or Dion Di Mucci's 'Runaround Sue' (both Number 1 hits in the US in 1961). Constant comment on teen mores emerged as early as 1957 with the Everly Brothers' 'Wake Up Little Susie', a song explicitly concerned with reputation or *what everybody else might think*.

The following year, the Everlys also pioneered the theme of romantic teen fantasies with their 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' (whose 'taste your lips of wine' recalled nothing so much as the fad for flavoured lipsticks). In 1960, they were still concerned with reputations, via 'Cathy's Clown' – the plaint of a lover who has been made to look a fool. The Everlys, however, were an exquisitely unique pop duo. Sharp pros with faultless, piercing harmonies and the sinister fascination of an almost delinquent appearance, they would share a mike as if kissing when on stage.

Don and Phil set the scene for a stream of harmony groups: all letter sweaters and

V-necks, capped with a falsetto and a smile. These groups made high school hits; Danny and the Juniors' 'At The Hop'; the Kalin Twins' 'When'; the Diamonds' 'Little Darlin' '. Sometimes they showed real originality: the Four Seasons (whose lead singer Frankie Valli would let rip a falsetto which could cause stockings to run) were almost camp ... Their candy-floss pop spun into smash after smash with a set of high, high harmonies architected by their production writing team of Bob Crewe and Bob Gaudio.

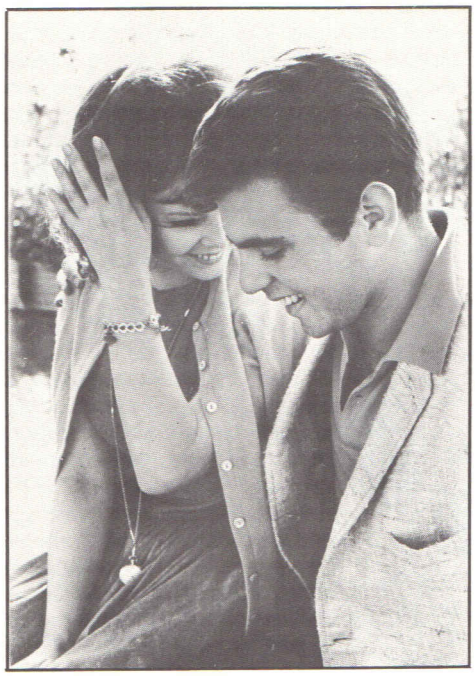
**Promoting the 'Crush'**

Adult managers. Adult writers. Adult producers who had to manufacture these teen-orientated sounds without alienating the adult world in whose living-rooms the record players were located and where the ritualistic slumber parties (necessitating a stack of 45s for the girls to dance together to) were held. To accomplish this, they had zeroed in on a single subject – the Teenage Crush – and elevated it to epic status.

It was a 'safe' subject: one which was effectively non-sexual, existed largely in the imagination and could be addressed in many modes, from the Crickets' bouncy adolescent declarations, ('It's So Easy', 'Peggy Sue'), Tommy Roe's sub-Holly paean 'Sheila', and – of course – through the longings of submissive females, the Shirelles' 'Dedicated To The One I Love' and the Marvelettes' 'Please Mr Postman', or Helen Shapiro's 'Walkin' Back To Happiness'. Some females were hardly immune to more individual longings however: Brenda Lee with her 'Sweet Nothin's' and Connie Francis, the archetypal Fifties Big Sister singer with her 1961 chart hit 'Where The Boys Are', sometimes managed more subversive lyrics and approaches.

**The Crystals' celebrations**

A girl's biggest fear was still getting a bad reputation and getting taken for a ride – a fear encapsulated in the Shirelles' 'Will You Love Me Tomorrow'. The Shirelles were the first success for their producer Luther Dixon at Scepter-Wand in New York, and their little girl, gospel-tinged harmonies were the first indication that *girl* vocal groups might mirror in the marketplace the solid teenage 'girl culture' (centred mainly around boys) which had evolved throughout the Fifties. In 1961, Phil Spector – partly inspired by Dixon – formed LA's Philles Records and recorded the Crystals' increasingly amped-up celebrations of the One Boy: 'There's No Other (Like My Baby)', 'He's A Rebel' and the rather startling 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)'. The latter was removed from the shops but it wasn't the only explicit expression of the love-hate response that teens of each sex felt towards their pressured social polarisation. After all, Dion sang 'I should knock you down and slap your face/Bad girls like you are a disgrace' in 'Little Diane'.



*Above: Teen-idol Fabian and friend – the ideal image of young love. Below: Big sister Connie Francis.*

There was, as ever, room for plenty of novelty numbers in the charts of the late Fifties and early Sixties – the Coasters' 'Yakety Yak', Chubby Checker's ubiquitous 'The Twist' and 'Let's Twist Again' and Gary US Bonds' 'Quarter To Three'. Novelty records were goodtime party fare – a giggle – and in that sense contributed at least to the gathering of the sexes and a shared sense of humour. Songs like Neil Sedaka's 'Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen' and Bobby Vee's 'Take Good Care Of My Baby' were rather in the same league. But there were rare gems like Little Eva's peerless 'The Locomotion' – not to be touched for its brand of simple celebration until Martha and the Vandellas' 'Dancing In The Street'.

'The Locomotion' was the kind of winner which leapt right out of a juke box and went straight for the soul via the feet. You couldn't fail to respond, but in and around such pearls of the day the Crush Epic ruled. Lovers pined away anticipating the separation summer vacation would bring ('It Might As Well Rain Until September' by Carole King; 'Sealed With A Kiss' by Brian Hyland). And the female exalted the male continually as something to be worshipped, to dress for, act a part for, sacrifice and wait for – in short, to live for (typical were Shelly Fabares' 'Johnny Angel' and the Shirelles' 'Soldier Boy'). The most a girl would merit, when all the hyperbole was stripped away was to be, in the particular, 'Bobby's Girl' (Susan Maughan) or, in the general, 'Poetry In Motion' (Johnny Tillotson). Meanwhile, the lads travelled light and fast – Dion personified 'The Wanderer'; even Ricky Nelson recorded a ditty titled 'Travelin' Man'.

**The search continues**

Teens continued, however, to feel alienated and continued to search for something more meaningfully their own until the Beatles broke through the adult suppressions and perversions of real rock'n'roll. This continued search was what put Jackie Wilson's ballads into the charts before his sound was called 'soul'; it put Little Richard up there too, until he found the Lord, and it responded with the same fervour to the satin-smooth romance of the Drifters' 'Save The Last Dance For Me' (1960) as to the disillusioned schmaltz of *two* hit versions of 'Paper Roses', successfully recorded in 1960 by both Anita Bryant in the United States and the Kaye Sisters in the UK.

Most of all, the romance in this era's rock and pop is epitomised by the puffy-faced Roy Orbison's swelling and soaring laments, especially 'Only The Lonely'. Looking back over 1958-62, 'Only The Lonely' has to be *the* teen anthem – elaborate, theatrical gift-wrapping which, when peeled away, revealed the most private possessions of teenhood: its doubts and its feelings of solitude vis-à-vis working the world out for oneself. Like Elvis' equally grandiose 'Are You Lonesome Tonight?' or Ricky Valance's morbid death hit ('Tell Laura I Love Her', still the best of its genre), it spoke straight to teens and the corn quotient didn't matter. The very equilibrium, the dignity with which the singer faced his isolation, the careful confidence with which he phrased each mournful clause, implied that there was some place, somewhere a man – or even a woman – might feel free. Free as in mobile, as in 'cool', as in loved. As free as the physical anarchy and irresistible appeal of the earliest rock'n'roll had originally promised.

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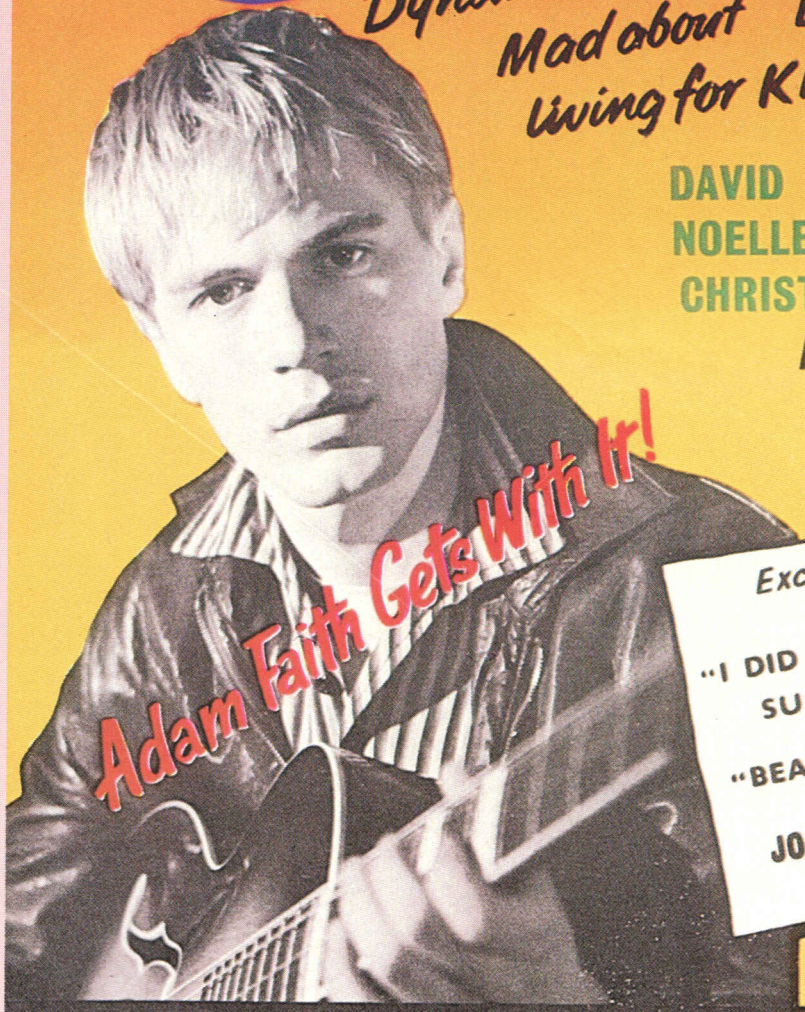


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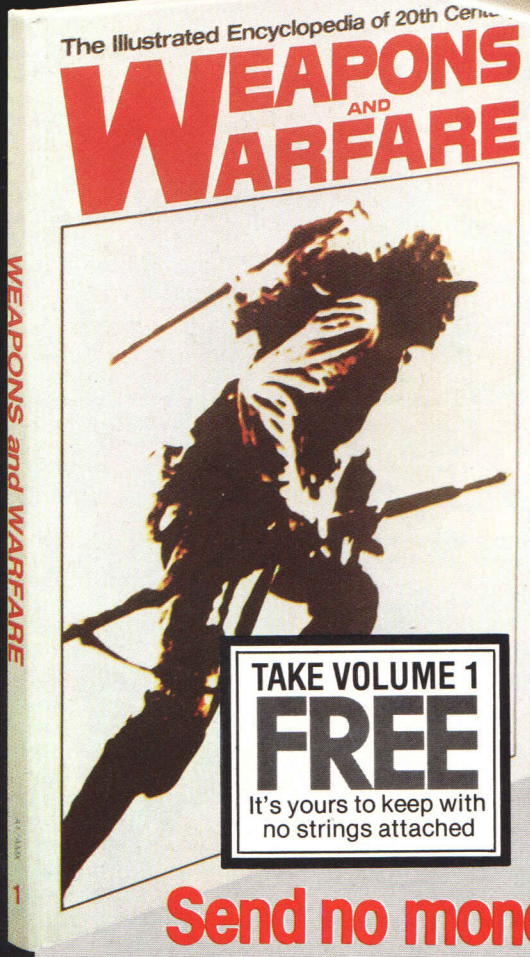


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